



'Now You See Me, Now You Don't: Adolescents Exploring Deviant Positions'. In Pichler, P. and Eppler, E. (2009) Gender & Spoken Interaction. Palgrave Macmillan. pp. 63-86.

Irwin, A. (2009). 'Now You See Me, Now You Don't: Adolescents Exploring Deviant Positions'. In Pichler, P. and Eppler, E. (2009) Gender & Spoken Interaction. Palgrave Macmillan. pp. 63-86. In *Gender & Spoken Interaction* (pp. 63-86). Palgrave Macmillan.

[Link to publication record in Ulster University Research Portal](#)

Published in:
Gender & Spoken Interaction

Publication Status:
Published (in print/issue): 01/01/2009

Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

General rights
Copyright for the publications made accessible via Ulster University's Research Portal is retained by the author(s) and / or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing these publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

Take down policy
The Research Portal is Ulster University's institutional repository that provides access to Ulster's research outputs. Every effort has been made to ensure that content in the Research Portal does not infringe any person's rights, or applicable UK laws. If you discover content in the Research Portal that you believe breaches copyright or violates any law, please contact pure-support@ulster.ac.uk.

Now you see me, now you don't: adolescents

exploring deviant positions

Anthea Irwin

INTRODUCTION

This chapter looks at how identities are constructed in the spoken interaction of two different groups of adolescents aged 13-16. A strong pattern throughout the data I collected is boundaries: the adolescents constantly reproduce the boundaries between themselves and others both as individuals and groups. The reproduction of boundaries we can observe in this data relates to Seltzer's (1989) notion of 'comparative acts', the act of constructing one's identity against those of others, which, while present through all life stages, is particularly pertinent and active among adolescents.

The chapter focuses on the extent to which the adolescents engage with the unacceptable and the 'uncool' in the process of their reproduction of boundaries. I adopt a qualitative discourse analytic approach drawing on Foucault's (1980) work on discourse and Goffman's work on framing (1974) and footing (1981), and identify five specific discourse strategies that speakers employ to carry out specific acts of

identity construction. The strategies employed vary according to social class identity, but all of the adolescents in my data use the strategies to highlight deviance, particularly when they negotiate deviant gender or sexual identity positions. The data is gendered in two ways: *what* the adolescents engage with often has to do with dominant versus alternative masculinities or femininities; and *how* they engage with it can vary according to the gender of the speakers. It is also interesting to observe how gender and social class interact in the identity work undertaken by these adolescents.

We will see that, while there is clear *engagement* with the unacceptable and the ‘uncool’ from all speakers, the extent of the *exploration* varies, and all of the adolescents voice and extend their knowledge of these positions without actually inhabiting the positions fully themselves. The engagement is either temporary or partial depending on the discourse strategy employed.

THE DATA: ADOLESCENTS’ SPOKEN INTERACTION

In an attempt to highlight links between adolescents’ conversational interaction and their construction of identity, I decided to focus on spontaneous peer group interaction in a non-school setting. I looked at adolescents aged 13-16 as, based on Seltzer’s work on ‘comparative acts’, I expected the processes of identity construction in interaction to be more explicit in this age range. For the practical reason of voice recognition I chose drama groups. Voice recognition was a potential problem for two related reasons, numbers of adolescents and lack of contact. I was looking not for friendship group interaction but for overall peer group interaction,

and this meant that I could have many (if not all) the adolescents from any one group on tape. I would therefore need some kind of prolonged contact with the adolescents in order to get to know their voices. However, other considerations precluded this. I wanted my data to be as spontaneous as possible and therefore wanted my presence to alter the group dynamic as little as possible (cf. Labov's (1972) notion of the "observer's paradox"). I therefore decided to approach drama groups. In this context it would be possible for me both to record the adolescents interacting casually prior to the session and in break times, and to observe them interacting verbally in structured sessions. The former would provide me with relatively more spontaneous data, the latter would enable me to familiarize myself with individual voices, something that would be essential for transcribing.

One group was based in a working-class area of North London (hereafter WCG), and the other in a middle-class area of South West London (hereafter MCG). Group membership was not completely made up of individuals of one or other class grouping, but it was predominantly so. Initially I met with the adolescents, explained that I was interested in seeing how they interacted with one another, and discussed with them the possibility of taping some of their conversations. Once I had answered various questions about what my work would be used for and who would see it, the adolescents all agreed to be taped. There were on average twelve participants in each group each time I recorded. I attended each group six times over a three-month period and on average one hour of data was recorded during each visit, so the total dataset for each group was approximately six hours.

I explained to the adolescents that they could rerecord or destroy the tapes at any time if they were not happy with what was on them. The actual taping was done in unstructured pre-session or break times, and on each occasion I gave a dictaphone

to one young person. I asked her or him simply to press the record button and carry the dictaphone around discreetly while interacting as normal. This meant that, while all the adolescents were aware that they would be recorded at some point, they were not aware of specific recordings until afterwards. This, I believe, created the optimal balance between meeting ethical guidelines and gathering spontaneous data. In order to maintain the participants' anonymity; all names were changed during the transcription process.

Seltzer observes that adolescents' selves are not distinct, that boundary lines are blurred (1989:21). Considering this possibility, I decided that a 'one at a time' representation of adolescent talk was likely to be unsuitable. For this reason, I have used the stave format of transcription suggested by Edelsky (1981) and developed by Coates (1986; 1988; 1996). This aims to show conversation as a collaborative rather than a 'one at a time' venture. While this format was introduced to better represent the conversation of women friends, it is interesting to observe the extent to which it is suitable to represent the conversation of adolescents of both genders given Seltzer's point about indistinct selves. (Please see transcription conventions at the end of the chapter.)

METHODOLOGY

In order to identify specific discourse strategies that speakers employ to carry out specific acts of identity construction, I adopt a qualitative discourse analytic approach drawing on Foucault's (1980) work on discourse and Goffman's work on framing (1974) and footing (1981).

Foucault: Discourse and the reproduction of dominance and deviance

The data lends itself to a Foucauldian reading, particularly in relation to Foucault's (1980) notion of 'discourse'. He says that there are always multiple discourses on any one topic vying for dominance. Discourses for Foucault are systems of thought that relate notions and objects to each other in particular ways, usually involving positioning them as relatively dominant or deviant. Discourses are continually reproduced by specific statements made by individuals and larger entities like government and the media. Although government and the media have considerably more power than individuals, Foucault is clear that the reproduction of discourses is a dynamic process that occurs at all levels of society and should not simply be seen as a 'top-down' phenomenon:

Power is exercised through a net-like organisation. And not only do individuals circulate between its threads; they are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power (Foucault 1980: 98).

It is illuminating to view my data through a Foucauldian lens: the adolescents' specific utterances in interactions can be seen to reproduce wider discourses, and the

boundaries they engage with can be usefully described as being boundaries between what is dominant and what is deviant.

Goffman: Framing and Footing

Goffman's work on framing (1974) and footing (1981) is relevant to an analysis of the adolescents' linguistic strategies. Speakers co-operate around a specific frame in conversation that allows them to interpret each other's utterances. It is possible to change frame and this is often actioned at moments of tension, but the change of frame must be marked (or 'keyed') so that other speakers can continue to interpret the proceedings. The notion of footing deconstructs the relationship between speaker and utterance and claims that there is not a one-to-one relationship between the two.

There are three voices involved in any utterance: firstly, there is the animator, the person that utters the words; secondly, there is the author, the person that originated the beliefs; thirdly, there is the principal, the person whose viewpoint is currently being expressed. Sometimes the roles of author and principal are explicitly attributed to someone else, for example when a broadcast journalist reports events in which other people have been involved and s/he her/himself has not. Different formations of the three roles may occur more subtly, however, in talk in any context, naturally occurring or otherwise. The only role that is entailed by speaking an utterance is that of animator. Regarding the other two roles, put simply, the speaker takes on the role of author if s/he uses her own words; and s/he takes on the role of principal if she speaks sincerely. Conversely, the role of author may be attributed to someone else by quoting another speaker; and the role of principal may be revoked

by speaking ironically, or in other words 'saying what you don't mean'. In this case the role of principal is not attributed to anyone else: it is simply avoided altogether.

The roles of author and principal are complex however. Regarding the author, the distinction between quoting and not quoting another speaker is not a simple one. Speakers may consciously invoke another speaker when they speak, either explicitly, by directly quoting from them, or implicitly, by appropriating a voice (see also Maybin, this volume). Invoking another speaker may also happen unconsciously: if we accept that identity and knowledge are constructed in interaction, we would expect speakers to allude to previous exchanges in present ones, sometimes unconsciously. Indeed, given the degree of intertextuality in language use (cf. Bakhtin 1986), it is very rare that any utterance will be entirely new and original. The invoked exchanges and other speakers will not necessarily be from the current speaker's local context, but may also be from wider public life or the media. Regarding the role of principal, again the distinction between sincerity and insincerity or irony is not a simple one. If we accept that certain discourses become dominant in society and are consequently taken as 'given' or 'the norm', a speaker drawing on these may unconsciously act as the principal of particular positions.

Clayman (1992) develops Goffman's concept of footing in order to analyse how neutrality and drama are achieved simultaneously by political interviewers. They can introduce to their interviewees opposing points of view and challenges from other people (authors), while at the same time leaving their own position ambiguous (i.e. whether or not they are the principal of the utterance). In this way utterances are marked as controversial, while at the same time speakers avoid the potential results of voicing such controversial material. The adolescents whose conversation I am analysing seem to use the same linguistic strategies to voice

potentially deviant discourses and negotiate the boundary between dominant and deviant: similar to interviewers avoiding 'taking sides', the adolescents engage with positions while avoiding being statically positioned in one way or another.

THE DISCOURSE STRATEGIES

WCG

The adolescents in WCG give deviant positions a voice in two ways, by saying an utterance and then retracting it and, on one occasion, by shifting positions. When they retract an utterance, they do so with the phrase 'only joking', immediately or after having been challenged by another speaker. As such they shift into a different frame but immediately mark this shift as having been playful and then re-establish the initial frame. In terms of footing, the speaker thus withdraws her/his claim to have been the principal of the previous utterance. This gives the adolescents the opportunity to explore alternative discourses and positionings while still marking their knowledge of and adherence to the dominant discourse.

The second of the two ways in which the adolescents in the WCG voice deviant positions occurs in one isolated piece of data. The second strategy relates to the first, but is more complex. Rather than saying an utterance and then retracting it, speakers say a number of utterances in succession which construct different positions for them. Both authorship and principal are in question; authorship because there is significant intertextual reference in the utterances, and principal because the positions contradict each other. The adolescents in WCG can thus be seen to inhabit shifting positions.

MCG

The adolescents in MCG, on the other hand, voice deviant positions but avoid inhabiting them until such times as they have been communally evaluated. The linguistic strategies they use include: switching between possible and actual worlds, a marked shift of framing that problematises the extent to which a speaker is viewed as the principal of an utterance;

switching between the grammatically general (e.g. general 'you') and the grammatically specific (e.g. 'I' or 'we'), which problematises authorship; and switching between questions and statements, which at the question stage renders principal irrelevant or at most suggested.

These discourse strategies illustrate that the boundary between 'dominant' and 'deviant' is an issue for both groups. The strategies appear predominantly where gender and/or sexuality are being constructed, and it is on these examples that this chapter will focus. In some cases there is a difference within the group on what is to be considered acceptable or normal behaviour. In other cases speakers take a role or behaviour that would be considered deviant in a parental or wider societal group and negotiate whether or not it is to be categorised as deviant in their own peer group.

DATA ANALYSIS: DEVIANT POSITIONS IN ADOLESCENTS' SPOKEN INTERACTION

WCG

This section will consider three instances of the use of the utterance retraction strategy and a single incidence of the shifting positions strategy.

WCG: 'only joking'

Extract 1. Participants: Alysha and Katrina

In this extract, Alysha explains that she got an item of clothing from her mother when her mother no longer required it.

1

Al: yeah my mum (.) oh my god I'm a mother (.) I'm only joking (.) it was my

Ka:

.....

2

Al: mum's but I took it off her cos she got a bigger one (.)

Ka: oh (.)

Alysha explores the fact that, by possessing this item of clothing, she presents herself as 'a mother'. The extract can be interpreted in various related ways, and Alysha could be engaging with one or all of the related subject positions. Firstly, Alysha could be positioning herself literally as a mother and exploring the deviant nature of that position: whilst there are many teenage mothers in the UK, teenage motherhood is generally positioned as taboo in dominant discourses around the norms of lifestyles and life trajectories. Alysha could also be positioning herself as emulating her own mother. This could be deviant either due to the considerably different fashions and femininities engaged with by different generations, or due to the fact that adolescence is a key period of presenting oneself as independent of one's parents, also in terms of clothing/fashion (although Seltzer claims that this is to some extent a false independence as dependency is arguably shifted from the parent(s) to the peer group at this stage).

Alysha highlights the taboo aspect of her words 'I'm a mother' by prefacing them with 'oh my god', and breaks the association with mothers completely by later saying 'I bought it from the shop'. By saying 'only joking' she does not simply factually state that she

is not a mother: given the regularity of use and recognisable function of ‘only joking’ in this group, she also marks being a mother as unacceptable in the dominant discourse of the group. It would appear that by doing so she is engaging particularly with gendered aspects of her identity. By ‘playing with’ the subject position of ‘mother’ she is perhaps acknowledging the multiplicity of femininities available to young women and the fact that these are positioned as variously dominant and deviant by current dominant discourses of adolescence.

Extract 2. Participants: Alysha and Katrina

During the following extract, Alysha is filling out a Drama Group membership form and has reached the male/female category.

1

Al: uh [*telephone number date of birth*] (1.0) um could I be a male or a female (.)

Ka:

.....

2

Al: er|m fe|male | (.) no I’m not (.) I’m joking (1.5)

Ka: |male (*laughs*)|

The ‘I’m joking’ here cancels her claim to be male (‘no I’m not [female]’). By using ‘I’m joking’, she is able to voice a discourse that allows her to explore an alternative gender identity but still mark it as unacceptable in the dominant discourse. This is a good example

of collaborative identity construction in that Alysha invites others to engage in the conversation and subsequent positioning by using a question (stave 1), Katrina voices an alternative gender identity for Alysha but laughs whilst doing so, and Alysha then steps back out of the alternative discourse and marks the exchange with ‘I’m joking’.

Extract 3. Participants: Alysha, Julie, Jay and Elsie

The gender identity question is salient again in the following extract which, like extract 2, occurred in relation to filling out membership forms. In this case, Elsie, the adult receptionist in the theatre, is filling in a student’s/member’s (Jay) information.

1

Al:

Ju:

Jay: EGA (.) EGA (.)

Elsie: right Jay what school are you at (.) what (.)

2

Al:

Ju: Jay’s always lying (.)

Jay: Elizabeth Garrett Anderson (.)

Els: what’s EGA (.)

Al: EGA (.) he go Central (.) oi Jason come here (.)

Ju:

Jay: I'm only joking (.)

EGA is an all girls' school in the immediate area. Jay therefore does what I would term 'unfixing' male identity by claiming to go there, that is, he challenges the binary nature of dominant stereotypical constructions of gender. He says 'I'm only joking' to cancel this out and return to voicing the dominant discourse of the group. Interestingly, rather than engage with this exchange humorously as we saw with Katrina above, Julie marks the fact that Jay is 'lying', thus aligning herself with Elsie, the adult receptionist, rather than with Jay, which might suggest some antagonism between genders in the group.

WCG: shifting positions

When analysing the extract below, it is necessary to take into account the fact that the boys are aware of the tape recorder, at least to begin with: Kevin says 'they're recording you' and the quality of the recording often suggests that the speaker is holding the tape recorder up to his mouth and thus arguably speaking directly to me. (When this conversational exchange occurred I had just given the tape recorder to Jay, reassured him that it worked (stave 1) and moved off to a different part of the building.) This places me in a relationship of what I would term 'detached presence' to the conversation. Although the boys signal that they view me as an adult and therefore as a power holder in some senses, this 'detached presence'

means that they can choose whether to allow me my power holding status or not. Kevin uses several voice styles in the extract. These are marked as gospel (‘*gosp*’), nursery rhyme (‘*n.r.*’) and rap (‘*rap*’) on the transcript (see also transcription conventions at the end of this chapter).

Extract 4. Participants: Jay, Kevin, Richard and Anthea

1

J: it never works = |oh | OK (.)

K: they're recording

R:

A: = **that** never works yes it |does|

2

J: |what I do |every week (.)

“*gosp*” K: you (.) “hallelujah |[?praise the name of Jesus a little money”|

R: |what you doing|

3

J: what I do every week (0.5) |for that

“*n.r.*” K: = “my name is called |Kevin

R: what (.) who for =

4

J: lady|

“*n.r.*” K: | (.h) I come from down the lane (.h) I play every day (.h) with my

R:

5

J:

“*rap*” K: friends” (.h) “**suck it** da (.h) da da da da da” (.h) Jay **don't** (.h) “da da da da

R:

6

J:

K: da (.h) da da da da da (.h) Richard is a bastard Jay is a pussy [ʔclart]”

R:

7

J: why you saying that for (0.5) you're rude (1.0)

K:

R:

8

J:

K:

“*rap*” R: “[cos] it's Mo the Mask again (.) no you won't (.) and shut your mouth (.) and

J:

K:

R: that's the bottom line (.) because Stone Cold says so" (.)

Firstly, Kevin role-plays “gospel” singing (staves 2 and 3), perhaps to suggest a “morally upright” side to adolescent identity. Next he speaks/sings in a “nursery rhyme” style (staves 3-5), thus presenting himself as a young innocent child (‘the little boy who lives down the lane’ from the nursery rhyme ‘Baa baa black sheep’) which adds to the effect of the earlier “morally upright” reference. He ‘plays with’ his ‘friends’, so presenting himself as a sociable, well-adjusted human being, yet still childlike and innocent. Then he changes the role dramatically. He begins to speak/sing in a “rap” style. There are sexual references (‘suck it’, ‘it’ referring to his penis; ‘Jay is a pussy clart’, ‘pussy’ referring to female genitalia and ‘clart’ meaning something like ‘dirty person’). The sexual references and force of his utterances may suggest he is aligning himself with a specific kind of rap, gangsta rap (see also Pichler, this volume).

Why does he present these apparently contradictory positions? Fraser and Cameron (1989) argue that, although two or more utterances spoken by the same person may contradict each other in terms of truth conditional semantics, we need not automatically say that that person is “lying” or not saying what they mean. In some cases what they are actually doing, in Foucauldian terms, is exploring the different discourses which exist in the social sphere which they inhabit. Coates (1999) illustrates a similar point with examples of girls drawing alternatively on patriarchal and feminist discourses.

In the above extract, Kevin sets up a relationship between himself and me, and by extension with adults in general: after realising that the conversation is being recorded, Kevin's voice becomes louder and more proximal, suggesting that he is speaking into the tape recorder and, by extension, to me. His tone when playing the "gospel" and "nursery rhyme" roles is rather ironic, whereas when playing the "rapper" role it is more sincere and arguably forceful. This difference suggests that his voicing of multiple discourses is not random: he intends it to be read as structured in some way. In my opinion he attempts to subvert what he sees as adults' norms regarding adolescent behaviour (innocence and purity for instance) by devaluing the innocent, childlike position and shifting to an oppressive adult image in its place. It also suggests that he is not simply talking *to* me (adults); he implies a dialogue *with* me. He does not appropriate an adult voice. However, his ironic presentation of the angelic and childlike roles implies 'this is how *you* see me' or 'this is how *you* say I should be'.

Kevin explicitly presents the adolescent/adult relationship as problematic. The reflection of himself in how adults (the "other" in this case) see or describe him is not something he identifies (or wishes to identify) with. He subverts and remoulds the image until it is an acceptable one: in other words, he identifies with something other than the subject position he has been provided with by the dominant "adult / parental morality" discourse. His identification with 'deviant' positions is considerably less tentative than the identification we have seen in the other extracts. Why should this be the case? I believe the presence of the tape recorder allows Kevin to "bend the rules". The context allows him to actually replace one dominant discourse with another one. This seems to be a contradiction in terms as we would expect that there can only be one discourse in any one context which can be labelled "dominant". Due to the presence of the tape recorder, however, Kevin effectively has two audiences. He shifts the dialogue from one between himself and "adults"

(or the “adult” dominant discourse invoked by the ‘gospel’ and ‘nursery rhyme’ voices) to one between himself and his peers (or the “adolescent” dominant discourse invoked by the ‘rap’ voice). The presence of an adult (me) is channelled through the tape recorder. Adults can thus be afforded or denied speaker status in Kevin’s conversation as he wishes. When role-playing the position of “child”, he affords adults these rights (metaphorically in terms of recognising that they “voice” the dominant discourse). He denies adults these rights at the point of subversion. The rights are given instead to the peer group in the metaphorical sense that they “voice” the dominant “adolescent” discourse of overtly sexualised masculinity: he chooses to take his positioning from them.

As the interaction continues, Jay questions the role Kevin has played out and evaluates him as ‘rude’ (stave 7). This utterance can, like Kevin’s, be analysed in different ways. We could say that Jay, knowing I will listen to the tape, plays the “adult” role to place himself in a superior position to Kevin. However, his tone is not harsh; he does not sound very serious. I would claim that he actually takes on the “adult” role in order to facilitate the continuation of the adolescent / adult conversation that has begun with Kevin’s utterance. Kevin no longer needs to imply the voice or input of the adult: it is appropriated by Jay. The fact that Jay has responded to a need suggests that he is aware of the identity work which is going on. It is also interesting that he voices the “adult” in such an indifferent fashion. He may simply want to fill the necessary role, rather than be seen to identify completely with it. However, if, as will become apparent below, all the boys are to some extent aware of the identity work that is going on, they also know what Jay is doing and he therefore has nothing to prove. Perhaps he therefore voices the adult discourse indifferently so that it is more open to challenge.

Looking at Richard’s input simply, we could say that he is performing a track from a computer game (‘Mo the mask’ and ‘Stone Cold’ are characters in a computer wrestling

game). However, two things suggest that he is stepping into the “adolescent” position in the conversation which has been going on between (and within) Kevin and Jay. Firstly, he possibly (the recording is unclear) begins his utterance with ‘cos’, a signal that he is answering Jay. Secondly, his choice of track is apt: the characters are strong and the words allow him to adopt an authoritarian stance and to silence the discourse used by Jay (‘no you won’t (.) and shut your mouth’). So, Kevin presents a contradictory image of the adolescent and then Jay and Richard continue the conversation in a way which further confuses how the “adolescent” should be viewed.

The contradictions arising from the form and content of these boys’ talk is notable. The form could be read as somewhat collaborative in that the boys step into roles that aid one another’s identity construction. When content is considered, however, Cameron’s (1997) work on male college students provides an interesting comparison. The young men in her data interact in a collaborative *style*, and thus could potentially be seen to inhabit something other than a stereotypically masculine position (Coates 1996 and 1999 identifies this collaborative style as common of groups of women speakers and uncommon of groups of male speakers). Regardless of this, however, Cameron illustrates that they perform ‘the same old gendered script’ (Cameron 1997: 282) which draws on sexist and homophobic discourses. Similarly, Jay, Kevin and Richard shift positions and thus carry out identity work, but the positions they shift between are stereotypical ones.

MCG: actual versus possible worlds

In this section I shall analyse three extracts. In the first the girls attempt to position themselves in relation to stereotypical and alternative adolescent femininities. The second

involves a discussion about the evaluation of being sexually active, with particular focus on the acceptability of discussing this with one's father. The third involves a playful exchange that potentially challenges the dominant norm of heterosexuality. As with WCG, the discourse strategies appear where there is a difference of opinion about what is considered normal or acceptable. This difference of opinion may be perceived or actual and may involve the speaker (and by extension the conversational peer group) and one of various other groups, contemporary or parental.

Extract 5. Participants: Anna, Cassie and Diane

In the following extract, Cassie, in conversation with Anna, who is a skater, attempts to reconcile the discourses of the skating group with those of the wider peer group. She recognises that, while she is not (and probably never will be) a skater, it may be strategic to adopt some aspects of skaters' discourse. This is due to skaters' ambiguous relationship to the adolescent peer group as a whole. Although many skaters themselves see some of their own opinions as diametrically opposed to those of the wider peer group, they are viewed as 'cool' by many non-skaters.

In this extract, Cassie attempts to find out about the relative evaluation of behaviours in the skating peer group and then positions herself in relation to these, thus problematising the norms of the peer group as a whole. The fact that she chooses shopping as the topic illustrates that she observes gendered aspects of identity to differ between the two groups more than other aspects. In doing so she is perhaps challenging the more stereotypical norms of girlhood one can come across in general adolescent peer groups.

1

An: em (.) no |not | really =

Ca: |like| = would you go skating rather than go

Di:

.....

2

An: I can't stand shopping (.) I

Ca: out shopping or something like that (.)

Di:

.....

3

An: swear = |all| my friends all my friends are like oh *yeah*

Ca:

Di: = nor can |I |

.....

4

An: *Saturdays* we go shopping (.)

Ca: we go shopping like *once* uh in uh a

Di:

.....

5

An:

Ca: |while = at Christmas we went shopping enough for a

Di: |[2.5 indec.] a video =

An:

Ca: *lifetime* (.)

Di:

Cassie introduces a stereotypically gendered norm found in the wider adolescent peer group, the enjoyment of shopping by girls, and asks Anna where skating would be placed in relation to shopping in the skaters' discourse (staves 1-2). I am not simply taking for granted that the enjoyment of shopping is a norm of behaviour for adolescent girls. I am suggesting that Cassie marks it as such: it is fair to suppose that Anna, being a skater, will evaluate skating highly and therefore, for a relevant comparison to hold, Cassie must consider shopping to be evaluated relatively highly by adolescent girls in general. It is nonetheless interesting that Cassie uses only this question rather than stating the norm explicitly and then moving on to the question. In doing so, she does not position herself quite as completely as she could in the 'shopping is good' camp.

Anna's negative evaluation of shopping is clear: she says 'I can't stand shopping (.) I swear' (staves 2-3) and goes on to distance herself from it by marking out the words 'oh *yeah Saturdays* we go shopping' (staves 3-4) as being spoken by all her friends (i.e. not by herself) and by uttering them in an ironic tone with much stress.

Cassie proceeds to shift her evaluation of shopping. As we have seen, she starts off by voicing it as a norm. Then she claims that she and her friends go

shopping '*once* in a while' (staves 4-5) and then she claims that she would never need to go shopping again (staves 5-6 'at Christmas we went shopping enough for a *lifetime*'). It is interesting that Cassie also places stress on some of her words in a similar way to Anna. This suggests that she wants to be seen as similar to Anna. It further suggests that she has shifted from speaking in the voice of the general adolescent peer group to speaking in the voice of the skating peer group.

On a basic level we could say that Cassie is the author of all of her utterances. However, she has shifted in terms of which discourse she is drawing upon in the development of her utterances, from the general adolescent to the skating discourse. She is of course not actually part of the skating peer group. Therefore what she has essentially done is to problematise the positioning of shopping within the general adolescent peer group. She starts out by alluding to its dominant position and ends up by voicing its deviant position by appropriating another voice. In terms of roles, her initial utterance in staves 1-2 cannot be appointed as principal, since it is in question form. Cassie appears to be the principal of her later utterances. Her use of the question form can therefore be seen as particularly strategic. Its use has permitted her to avoid being the principal of contradictory positions. Note, however, that she never explicitly evaluates shopping negatively (as Anna does when she says 'I hate shopping'). In other words her position has not completely shifted but rather remains ambiguous. This extract is just one of many occasions on which the non-skating girls speak with Anna about skating and related activities. The pattern, as illustrated in this extract, is an interesting one. Anna, or skaters in general, are not 'othered' even though skating could be viewed as a masculine pursuit. Instead, Cassie 'others' the stereotypically feminine pursuit of shopping to some extent, thus engaging with what could be termed alternative femininities and exploring the boundary between

‘dominant’ and ‘deviant’ as regards adolescent femininity. She does not completely break her identification with stereotypical femininity, however, as she stops short of positioning shopping completely negatively as Anna does.

Extract 6. Participants: Diane, Lana and Cassie

In the following extract, the girls negotiate their norms of sexual behaviour in relation to those of adolescents in general. Cassie marks as salient the position of being a virgin or not, and more specifically the question of whether to discuss with one’s father the fact that one is sexually active.

1

Di:

La:

Ca: it was i- (.) yeah it was last year and em (.) these people came up to

.....

2

Di:

La:

Ca: my friend and they sort of (.) they took her into this room (.) and they

.....

3

Di:

La:

Ca: were like (.) they were like telling her about how they were going to

.....

4

Di:

La:

Ca: make a film about teenage sex and things (.) and she she's not a virgin

.....

5

Di:

La:

Ca: and they were trying to get her to tell (.) her dad (.) that she wasn't a

.....

6

Di:

La:

Ca: virgin (.) and they were going to film her telling her dad (.) that she

.....

7

Di:

La:

Ca: wasn't a virgin (.) and her dad's like this big (.) bloke he's like quite

.....

8

Di:

La: oh my |god|

Ca: hard (.) |and| he'd probably like go and beat up this bloke

9

Di: |no| |laughs|

La: |laughs|

Ca: she'd lost her virginity to and so she was like em (.) |no| |laughs| (1.5)

10

Di:

La: my dad I mean you don't actually come out [?one day] and say right

Ca:

11

Di:

La: dad (.) I'm not a virgin any more =

Ca: = and they've got like these big

12

Di:

La: |yeah |

Ca: cameras in your |[?face]| and you're going dad I'm not a virgin and

13

Di: |why |

La: |what's| going on here (2.0) my dad would probably just

Ca: he's like (.)

.....

14

Di: my d- my dad

La: say (.) shut (.) up what *are* you talking about (1.5)

Ca:

.....

15

Di: would probably go ape and I would just go shut up(.)

La: my dad's strange

Ca:

In terms of basic sense, one reference to the state of virginity would have been sufficient, but Cassie repeats the word 'virgin' three times rather than, for example, referring to it with a demonstrative pronoun. The fact that the position is constructed with the negative (saying '*not* a virgin' rather than an alternative such as 'sexually active'), already suggests *potential* deviance, at least in relation to parents or other adults. Parents, or in particular fathers, are key here, and the focus on them could be interpreted in two ways. Is talking about one's dad's potential reaction to one being sexually active a positive discourse strategy that allows the girls to avoid marking sexual activity as dominant or deviant in their peer group immediately, instead

approaching it indirectly first? Or does the way they focus on fathers suggest that concerns about getting into trouble outside the peer group are actually a *barrier* to discussing sexual activity fully in the peer group? Tolman's (1994) work with adolescent girls talking about sexuality is illuminating in relation to this. She states that all the girls' 'experiences of sexual desire are strong and pleasurable, yet they speak very often not of the power of desire but of how the desire may get them into trouble' (1994: 338) and she refers to the 'standard "dire consequences" discourse adults usually employ' in relation to teenage sex as a potential initiator of the kind of talk the girls employ.

After Cassie has surmised what her friend's dad's reaction would be to being told his daughter was 'not a virgin' (staves 7-9), Lana begins to talk about her dad as a comparison (stave 10 – 'my dad'). However, she swiftly shifts from the first person to the general second person (staves 10 and 11 – 'I mean *you* don't actually come out one day and say "right dad" I'm not a virgin any more'). This takes the focus off her, which may suggest that she *wants* the focus to be taken off her. Given that she has begun to compare her dad to the dad in Cassie's story, it is reasonable to assume that she was going to go on to compare herself with the girl in Cassie's story. This would involve positioning herself as 'not a virgin'. Her shift to the general second person 'dilutes' this potential position. It allows everyone present, including herself, to position themselves as 'not a virgin', if they wish to, but it does not place any of them definitely in that position. In terms of footing, Lana has shifted from being the sole author of her utterances to being one of many authors or not an author at all. The use of the general second person causes ambiguity. It can be interpreted as everyone, or as an abstract person and therefore as none of the actual people present. At this point, Lana presents herself as principal of the idea that it would not be clever to tell

your dad that you had been sexually active, but avoids taking any position on whether or not she herself is sexually active, or whether or not such behaviour should be considered dominant or deviant for the group.

All three girls proceed to dramatise the scenario that would ensue were one (anyone in general) to tell one's dad that one wasn't a virgin (staves 11 ff.). The fact that they all join in would appear to implicitly mark the position of being 'not a virgin' as OK (if not dominant) for the group. After the dramatisation, the girls begin to engage in a peculiar kind of self-disclosure. They are still dealing in possible worlds by using the conditional to mark their position as hypothetical, i.e. '*if* I told my dad I wasn't a virgin, he *would* ...' so they have not explicitly marked the position of being 'not a virgin' as a dominant position within this peer group. However, they have shifted to fulfilling all three roles, animator, author and principal, for their utterances. This removes the position of being 'not a virgin' from the problematic category: by shifting their role position, the girls allude to the possibility that being 'not a virgin' *could* be a dominant position in the group. They have therefore, in this short exchange, negotiated the evaluation of being 'not a virgin' from completely ambiguous to possibly dominant.

It is interesting to consider Evaldsson's (2002) work as comparison here. She observes that, in Swedish preadolescent boys' gossip talk, there exists a regular pattern of shifting from 'the actual' to 'the hypothetical' once the target has been challenged (usually by a different speaker) in order to remedy the affront (Evaldsson 2002: 211). The pattern in this group of British adolescent girls' talk is the opposite: an immediate shift to the hypothetical followed by shift back to the actual signalling the girls now feel comfortable self-disclosing. This echoes Coates' (1999) findings that 14-15 year old middle class British girls use mirrored self disclosure as the key

aspect of building solidarity with one another. Pichler's (2006: 233) observations that working class British girls, particularly British Bangladeshi girls, use teasing rather than mirrored self-disclosure to fulfil this function, would suggest that both class and ethnicity are salient in interactional style amongst girls of this age.

Extract 7. Participants: Libby, Lily and Cassie

In the following extract, gender and sexual identities and the relationships between individuals are symbolically altered due to the group's discussion of a play they have been working on. They draw attention to which pairs of adolescents have been cast as the couples in the play. This juxtaposition of the world of fantasy with the world of reality could be seen to create some tension as it is important that individuals are not seen to be claiming that they *actually* have a relationship with the person in question, or even that they would *like* to.

1

f Lib: this is my *husband* (.) |she's got Andrew|

f Lil: where's *my* husband gone |[1.0 indec.] | oh

Ca:

.....

2

Lib:

f Lil: Andrew is my husband (.) = no Andrew is my

f Ca: my husband is Lianne =

.....

Lib: [indec ...]

Lil: fiancé [indec ...]

Ca: [indec ...]

The adolescents deal with this tension by altering their voices. They may or may not adopt the voices they use for their characters in the play, but in any case they have altered their volume and stress significantly. This ensures that the relationships are kept purely on the fantasy level. Individual speakers are the animators and authors of what they say, but they make it clear that they are not the principals, i.e. that they do not actually believe that what they are saying holds in the real world. It is interesting to note that, immediately after Cassie says, ‘my husband is Lianne’, Lily latches on saying ‘Andrew is my fiancé’. By doing so she shifts the focus away from Cassie’s symbolic relationship and back onto her own. Perhaps this is simply due to the fact that she wishes to correct information: Andrew is her fiancé rather than her husband as she said previously. Perhaps, however, she is purposefully signalling non-engagement with Cassie’s utterance, which could suggest that discussion, even on a fantasy level, of same sex partnerships is taboo in the group. Although this is a tentative analysis, the fact that input from all three speakers becomes inaudible at this point in the recording might support it further: is any discourse about same sex partnerships literally unable to be voiced? Elsewhere the speakers negotiate their position in relation to problematised and potentially deviant positions; in this case no negotiation is entered into.

CONCLUSIONS

This chapter has shown that boundaries between dominant and deviant positions are salient for these adolescents. It is clear that, for all the adolescents involved, questions of deviance are most salient when it comes to gender and sexual identities. Alysha explores the extent to which ‘motherhood’ in its various guises is acceptable in her peer group; Cassie explores the extent to which alternative ‘skater’ femininity can be appropriated by her peer group in place of stereotypical femininities; Alysha and Jay each play with assigning themselves a gender other than their current one; Diane, Lana and Cassie and Jay, Kevin and Richard explore in different ways how sexual activity, or at least discussing sexual activity with parents or other adults, is a particularly difficult area to broach; and Libby, Lily and Cassie arguably stop short of exploring alternative sexualities. In addition to the fact that *what* the adolescents engage with often has to do with dominant versus alternative masculinities or femininities, *how* they engage with it can also vary according to the gender of the speakers: in the working class group the shifting positions strategy is only employed by boys while the retraction strategy is employed by adolescents of both genders; and in the middle class group there is evidence of only the girls using any of the strategies (although this may be due to the relatively higher number of girls in the group and thus relatively more data of girls overall).

All of the extracts we have considered illustrate the adolescents exploring the ‘deviant’ side of boundaries, but doing so temporarily or partially via the use of specific discourse strategies. They engage particularly with potential deviance in relation to gender and sexual identities. Speakers in both groups employ aspects of “framing” and “footing” to explore potentially deviant roles, but the specifics of

these differ between the groups. Speakers in WCG switch between contradictory positions, either by inhabiting a position and then exiting it by saying ‘only joking’, or by shifting between different oppositional positions. Speakers in MCG voice potentially deviant roles but avoid fully inhabiting them by using questions, speaking hypothetically or moving into a fantasy frame. The adolescents thus carry out similar identity work, but with different dynamics: I would describe it as the speakers in WCG inhabiting deviant positions temporarily and speakers from MCG inhabiting deviant positions partially.

TRANSCRIPTION CONVENTIONS

(.)	micropause
(1.0)	timed pause
(.h)	in breath
(h)	outbreath
me-	unfinished word
<i>horrible</i>	stressed syllable
...	
... ...	overlapping speech
[?...]	indecipherable speech with time or estimated content stated
*	marks the utterance in which the linguistic feature under discussion occurs.
<i>‘gosp’</i>	spoken or sung in a gospel style

'n.r.'	spoken or sung in a nursery rhyme style
'rap'	spoken or sung in a rap style

REFERENCES

- Bakhtin, Mikhail M (1986) The Problem of Speech Genres. In *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*. Texas: University of Austin Press.
- Cameron, Deborah (1997) Performing Gender Identity: Young Men's Talk and the Construction of Heterosexual Masculinity. In Johnson, S. and Meinhof, U.H. *Language and Masculinity*. Oxford: Blackwell. 47-64.
- Clayman, Steven E (1992) Footing in the achievement of neutrality: the case of news interview discourse. In Heritage, J. and Drew, P. (eds.) *Talk at Work: Interaction in Institutional Settings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 163-198.
- Coates, Jennifer (1986) *Women, Men and Language*. London: Longman.
- Coates, Jennifer (1988) Gossip revisited: language in all-female groups. In Coates, J. and Cameron, D. (eds.) *Women in their Speech Communities: New Perspectives on Language and Sex*. London: Longman. 94-121.
- Coates, Jennifer (1996) *Women Talk*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Coates, Jennifer (1999) Changing Femininities: the Talk of Teenage Girls. In Bucholtz, M., Liang, A. C. and Sutton, L. A. (eds.) *Reinventing Identities: The Gendered Self in Discourse*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 123-144.
- Edelsky, Carole (1981) Who's got the Floor?. *Language in Society* **10** (3): 383-421.

- Evaldsson, Ann-Carita (2002) Boys' gossip telling: Staging identities and indexing (unacceptable) masculine behaviour. *Text* **22** (2): 199-225.
- Foucault, Michel (1980) *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*. London: Harvester Press.
- Fraser, Elizabeth and Cameron, Deborah (1989) Knowing what to say: the construction of gender in linguistic practice. In Grillo, R. (ed.) *Social Anthropology and the Politics of Language*. London: Routledge. 199-212.
- Goffman, Erving (1969) *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. London: Penguin.
- Goffman, Erving (1974). *Frame Analysis*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Goffman, Erving (1981) Footing. *Forms of Talk*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press. 124-159.
- Irwin, Anthea (2006) London Adolescents (re)producing power/knowledge: you know and I know. *Language in Society* **35**. 499-528.
- Labov, William (1972) 'The Isolation of Contextual Styles'. In Labov, W. (ed.) *Sociolinguistic Patterns*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press. 70-109.
- Pichler, Pia. (2006) Multifunctional teasing as a resource for identity construction in the talk of British Bangladeshi girls. *Journal of Sociolinguistics* **10** (2): 225-249.
- Said, Edward (1978) *Orientalism*. New York: Random House.
- Seltzer, Vivian Center (1989) *The Psychosocial Worlds of the Adolescent: Public and Private*. New York: Chichester.
- Tolman, Deborah L. (1994) Doing Desire: Adolescent Girls' Struggles for/with Sexuality. *Gender and Society* **8** (3): 324-342.